

TURKEY IS NOT EUROPE

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Napoleon said, ‘Geography is destiny.’ In truth, both Turkey and Russia are part European countries but they are also in significant part Asiatic countries. I have traveled in rural Turkey and it is by no means part of Europe. You can recognize that instantly: you’re on the border of Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and you have a very different mentality. The notion that Turkey could ever become part of the European Union was, in my view, a fantasy of European politicians; the Euro-politicians (and I’m a Euro-skeptic) and people in Europe rejected it knowing that Turkey is not a European country. And again, the reasons are not only geographic but cultural and historic.

The long domination of the Southern Balkans regions and the Eastern Mediterranean by Turkey and the fact that its religion was Islam produced a very different culture than one finds in Europe. Russia is also struggling with its

identity as reflected by some of its great writers. And you had in your history times of westernizers, I’m thinking of Peter the Great, and conversely times when you had a very anti-western mentality.

Western values are centered around some very important notions: the primacy of individual liberty, civil liberty and civil rights, the rights of an individual as opposed to the government, free press, free speech, and, very importantly, an independent judiciary. In this context, Turkey is moving in a very negative direction at the present time due to Ergenekon. Ergenekon is the name that Turkey gives to an alleged vast conspiracy to destabilize and overthrow the Turkish state. And under this Ergenekon, scores, perhaps hundreds of generals, journalists, lawyers and educators have been imprisoned. Many Turkish people I know and respect are complaining loudly that Ergenekon represents an assault by the present Turkish government on civil liberties and the rule of law.

Turkey is moving in a direction, in my view, that is a vast departure from Western values. It is true that when Ataturk established the modern Turkish state he brought all kinds of Western values to Turkey, such as the abolition of the fez, increased rights to women, and the adoption of the Roman alphabet in place of the Arabic alphabet, which all helped make Turkish culture more Western. But Ataturk by no means was a civil liberties man, and in fact had a very authoritarian regime. Turkey had the unique history that the guarantor of a kind of secular ‘democracy’ (and I will put

‘democracy’ in quotation marks) was the army, which intervened from time to time to preserve secular Turkey but not necessarily to preserve freedom in Turkey. I now see freedom going in the opposite and negative direction in Turkey.

This is also true of Russia. Many of us in the West who are concerned with the rule of law and democracy applaud the discarding of many of the traditions of the former Soviet regime, but you also have in many ways what seems to us like an authoritarian culture and system. I do not perceive that your courts are truly independent and when I see journalists and lawyers in Russia being killed, I very much worry about where Russia is going in terms of the values that we in the West have come to accept.

The fact that Turkey is a member of NATO is due to the historical conditions after WWII, when Stalin wanted to expand the Soviet Union’s borders and sphere of influence. So Turkey actually became the front-line of Stalinist imperialism. That has completely changed. The reason for Turkey to be in NATO has disappeared. Moreover, Turkey is now a functional ally of Iran and Syria. So, we have a fundamental realignment of Turkish foreign policies and, in my view, Turkey has become a very negative force within NATO as witnessed, for example, by its role in the Security Council sanctions against Iran contrary to the votes of both Russia and China, which in no way can be accused of being the lackeys of the United States. ■

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